

SENATOR JOHN BREAUX'S OPENING STATEMENT

November 8, 1999

THE BABYBOOMERS ARE COMING: AGING IN A NEW MILLENNIUM

No other generation reflects the complex world we live in today more than America's 77 million baby boomers. In fact, it was the "boom" of an atom bomb that ended World War II, brought millions of American soldiers home and the baby boomer generation was born.

Born between 1946 and 1964, the baby boomers have left their indelible mark on America's social landscape. They created a new pop culture and a new form of political activism. Their optimism was shaped by President Kennedy's call for public service and President Johnson's "Great Society" and dashed by the Vietnam War and Watergate.

Education, medical advances and technology afforded boomers more freedom and independence than any previous generation. They married and had children later, experienced history through television, and put child care and high tech on the map.

And now, as the baby boomers move toward old age, they will revolutionize and redefine the American aging experience. The question is, are we ready?

Soon, America will look different. The average age will go up to 55 and the over 65 population will double. There will be more seniors than teenagers. One out of every five Americans will qualify for a "senior" discount at the movie theater. And, there will be one million Americans over 100 years old.

In addition, the boomers will reap the benefits and face the challenges of longevity. Life expectancy in 1900 was 47 years but by 2050 it will be 80 or more. It is true, medical technology is adding years to their life. The question now is how do we add *life* to their years?

Here in Washington, the Congress has tried to address the impending senior boom through endless debate over Social Security and Medicare. While strengthening these programs is essential, these retirement and health care programs are only two pieces of a much bigger puzzle. The size and distinct character of the boomers will not only create a sense of urgency to current issues, but create a whole new set of aging issues.

Can we afford the medical technology that aging boomers will demand? As new health care industries emerge, who will protect the senior consumer? How will we handle the shortage of geriatricians? Will our transportation systems ensure more older drivers have safe alternatives? How will our national housing policy adapt to the senior boom? Will we need new pension and financial service plans that allow older Americans to move in and out of retirement? As new products are marketed to older adults, what will the government's role be in stopping fraud and abuse? And, what about helping the "sandwich" boomers who provide care for both their older parents and their younger children?

It's clear national policy makers have a lot to think about. As ranking member of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, I plan to help lead the Congress in a careful examination of our nation's new demographic destiny.

Working together, we can ensure that the seniors of today and the seniors of tomorrow achieve the very best as we enter the new millennium.

The 77 million baby boomers are watching and waiting.

We must be ready!